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The outcome of a first course in reading is proportionate to the quality of the course objectives and rationale. Since a first course in reading should achieve all its objectives in observable performance, the behaviorists' identification of goals with outcomes should guide the statement of objectives. Gaps between outcomes and objectives may be inevitable, but they can be partially bridged by an effective statement of rationale for the course. A rationale provides a point of view, a basic purpose for the course. Effective instruction depends on the quality of differential instruction which a teacher bases on data gathering, diagnosis, and decision making. The selection of objectives should be made from high frequency performance tasks having a good deal of intergrade level commonality. A first course in reading should emphasize the development of confidence toward the teaching of reading and a knowledge of the basic speech sounds and of the framework for phonetic and structural analysis. (WL)

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SELECTING OBJECTIVES FOR THE FIRST COURSE IN READING

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After a driver decides where he is going, a road map is of value. Until then, it is only a piece of paper. The same is true of the facts, skills, understandings, techniques, and procedures in a course in reading. Until an instructor decides what he wants his efforts and the student's energies to accomplish, massive studies, detailed notes, tricky gimmicks, and expensive equipment are all of little use. That is a reasonable comparison, since most of

us recognize that a person headed nowhere special is quite likely to get there.

Unfortunately, the objectives we set are often incompatible or not consistently matched with the outcomes we receive. The incongruence may be due to the objectives themselves, over-ambitiously desired outcomes, or the means we chose to achieve them. Our task as college teachers of reading is to select and achieve those goals most related to successful classroom performance in the teaching of reading. Ideally we would like to deal with these goals so they involve minimum risk and maximum enjoyment for our students.

Experience has proven that uncoordinated and out-of-focus objectives produce unsatisfactory results for everyone concerned. The most common practice appears to be a loose definiftion of program goals in terms of the content that will be displayed to the participants. More concern needs to be given to the desired change in professional performance that should result from the experience in the course.

The issue of the outcomes, the rationale, and the selected objectives of a first course in reading and their relationship to one another provides the purpose and scope of this paper.

The terminology used throughout this discussion needs

clarification at this point. "Outcomes," "ends," and "results" will be treated as synonomous terms. Likewise, "goals," "aims," "objectives," and "intents" will be considered to have connotations of similar importance.

Outcomes

The behaviorists would have us equate outcomes and objectives. While there is indeed much merit in applying the technique of the behaviorist, the one-to-one relationship between goals and ends is debatable. This perfect match quality is limiting in terms of aspirations and realism. We know too well we do not achieve all we would like, nor is what we obtain all of what we wanted.

Stating objectives (and therefore, for the behaviorist, the outcomes) in terms of proposed changes of behavior is a humbling experience. Our weaknesses immediately become conspicuous. However, if this approach helps us become more aware of our limitations and does not limit our range of explorations but serves as a catalyst for improvement, then benefits for all are accrued.

The behaviorist technique should be used in developing the first course in reading, but it is not a panacea for misguided efforts or unrealistic expectations. The outcomes of this first course should achieve all the stated objectives as expressed in terms of observable performance. The outcomes should achieve these goals and more.

Not all outcomes are easily stated or objectified. Because they cannot be so precisely stipulated does not mean they do not exist. Many of those aims we would like to attain, especially in the affective dimension and in all probability, in the cognitive realm also, cannot be readily assessed as an outcome. But they are there just the same.

For example, in my own first course in reading, the <u>first</u> stated objective is "to develop a feeling of confidence toward the teaching of reading." Whether this objective is achieved as an outcome is not always observable. All the other more specificly observed outcomes support and serve to develop this "confidence," but its verifiable attainment is not easily determined. As one student told me just recently, "When we started this course, I did not believe you about developing confidence, but now I think I know what you mean. At least I feel better about going into my student teaching."

Another case in point is regarding a student I had last semester. One of my aims for her was to learn "to be able to teach an effective reading lesson," and she did learn the measurable outcomes of the technique. Her cooperating teacher verified this but also reported, "Janice taught the lesson like a robot, void of any interest and enthusiasm." That was not an outcome wanted, taught for, or planned for, but it was received just the same.

Total outcomes in any course probably always will be greater than the number planned for achievement, both positively and negatively. Effort should be made to bring a closer match between objectives and outcomes, but the two are not perfectly equitable. It would be most unfortunate in any course if all that was accomplished was limited to the behavioral objectives listed prior to launching the instruction.

Rationale

The missing gaps between the outcomes and the objectives can be partly bridged by an effective statement of rationale for the course. Every course has a rationale, though too frequently it is only implicit.

The rationale provides the point-of-view, the philosophic principles underlying, or the basic purpose of, the course. If it does nothing else, it reveals for whom the course is designed and provides some limits on the content; i.e., rational numbers, etc., are not given treatment in a course in reading. However, an appropriate rationale should provide the basis for the objectives and the structure of the plan which is followed throughout the course. The objectives and instructional tactics grow out of the point-of-view expressed, overtly or covertly, and have lasting implications for the outcomes.

The most vivid illustration of the difference in

the assumptions underlying a course is very real in the lives of individuals who have taken a course in statistics. Universities typically offer courses in statistics in several different colleges or departments--education, psychology, mathematics, business, agriculture, etc. As any graduate student will tell you, it makes a difference from what department you take the course. Even if instructors between departments were to agree on a common set of objectives (which they do not!), the likelihood of common outcomes is doubtful. Why not?--because of the point-of-view or rationale influencing the conversion of the objectives into outcomes.

The same situation is true in reading courses. It is no secret that when multiple sections of the same first (or any other) reading course are offered and taught by different instructors even from the same department, the course is different. Just ask the students--they will tell you! Why? Many reasons could be given, but difference in the ground for opinion and action, i.e., rationale, is no small influencing factor. Some college reading instructors focus on theory, others research, gimmicks, gadgets, games, or other "bag of tricks." Still others emphasize one particular approach.

An instructor without rationale is like the peacock atop the windmill--he turns and swirls in any direction with

the slightest change in the wind. A well thought-out position, even if it is not communicated to the student, which it should be, provides the individual instructor firm ground for launching his take-off in planning meaningful objectives and transposing them into operational outcomes.

As for my own position in the first course in reading which I teach regularly, an initial handout is prepared which contains the statement of rationale, the course objectives stated in operational terms, and the course outline with other procedural statements. The rationale used has been labeled, "the 3-D Model for Differentiated Instruction." While this simple model needs some alteration, it reads:

> The rationale for this course is based on the assumption that effective instruction depends on the degree of differentiation provided for each individual receiving that instruction. Differentiated instruction depends upon three essential elements. These "3 D's" of differentiated instruction are: 1) data gathering; 2) diagnosis; and 3) decision-making.
>
> Teaching is basically a decision-making process. The teacher is constantly forced to make decisions regarding this type of presentation as opposed to another type; this type of material over a different possible selection of material; this skill taught at this particular time for this particular child, etc.
>
> However, the process of decision-making does not and cannot operate in a vacuum. Effective decision-making in the teaching process depends primarily upon the quantity and quality of the data which gives foundation to the

decision. (data gathering)

> Since raw data, no matter how much is available and how well selected, in and of itself may be meaningless mass, an insightful diagnosis must be made. The assimilation and integration of the data into a meaningful pattern for a discerning interpretation becomes the basis for an enlightened decision in the teaching-learning process.
>
> A teacher cannot teach well what he does not know well; therefore, certain basic essentials must be met and mastered. Knowing full well that a three-semester-hour course on reading cannot contain every facet from the broad reading area, a hierarchy of minimal competencies have been established for focus to relate to the "3 D's" of differentiated reading instruction.

In short, it is my hope that during the process from objective to outcome, the student in my class learns to begin to think clinically. Ericson describes thinking clinically as a mental process in which the individual "scans in his mind different <u>models</u> in which different modes of knowledge have found condensation."[1] The

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[1]Eric H. Erikson. <u>Insight and Responsibility</u>. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1964, p. 51.

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student has to acquire new information for his "memory bank" and learn to constantly scan the quality and quantity of his reading knowledge, skills, and habits and apply them with judgement, depending upon his attitudes and values.

<u>Objectives</u>

Meaningful objectives flow naturally and logically out of a rationale and not out of the instructor's whims,

accessibility of materials, or a textbook. Efforts which embrace an excessive concern for communicating what is most recent without a prior determination that this is most needed are usually met with meager success.

In the establishment of objectives for this first course in reading, two extremes are to be avoided: (1) statements so general that there is little beyond their scope, so any topic and activity will fit; and (2) statements so specific that they guarantee incomplete coverage of what the instructor thinks he is and should be accomplishing. Selecting the appropriate level of generality may be one of the most difficult tasks encountered; because if the objectives are too general, they are meaningless, and if the intents are too narrow, they become limiting and confining.

Most of us probably have never experienced many professional meetings where the goals discussed were too specific. On the other hand, we undoubtedly have had many experiences where agreement on general objectives was attained readily, for each individual read into them his own meaning. Perhaps these types of experiences should cue us that maybe as a professional group we have not explored specificity with enough serious intent.

What should be included in a beginning course in reading? That is the polemic question! The aims for

any course, and especially so in a first course, are open to an excessive number of objectives. "To dream the impossible dream" is fine for a musical comedy hero, or an academician in the "think-tank," but mere mortal college teachers of the first course in reading had better aspire to the possible. Therefore, some process of delimitation has to occur. But what rules do we use? What guidelines do we follow? There is always a surplus of behaviors or competencies which can be taught.

The reduction process from the infinite to the possible involves several steps. Those within the framework of the topic of this paper will be discussed. However, the degree of specificity in the operations, transactions, etc., will be dealt with by other papers on this program.

Concern first must be with the identification of those concepts which are most needed for the work of the beginning teacher of reading. These concepts can best be derived from the classroom reading teacher's task. Inspection must be made of the operations that are actually required in classroom performance. This analysis obviously will reveal many more behaviors than can sufficiently be capsuled into a single course in reading.

From the long array of behavioral tasks identified from classroom performance, reduction of the number is

absolutely essential. However, many of the identified tasks will occur with greater frequency than others. These high frequency habits and skills deserve first consideration, but high frequency, in and of itself, is not the only virtue involved. What is a highly common task for the first grade teacher, may be relatively rare for the fifth grade classroom reading teacher. A leavening effect has to temper the sharpness of high frequency of task occurrence.

In most reading methods classes, the student body is composed of individuals who perceive of themselves as being a first or fourth grade teacher, a primary or an intermediate level teacher. Try as you may as a college instructor to modify this self-concept to a broader vision, the student self-perception as to grade level is very real and presents some course difficulties. Certain objectives in the course will be of greater interest and utility to primary teachers than to intermediate teachers, and vice-versa. The selection of course objectives has to account for this variation.

Therefore, the selection of the course objectives should be made from those high frequency performance tasks which have high inter-grade level commonality. Concern might be raised that this approach is a move toward the "mean," and it would be so, if the instructor

had more than ample instructional time--which he does not! Reducing the course objectives in this fashion places the emphasis upon the essential competencies needed for teaching reading, regardless of grade level taught. If this process is communicated to the student at the outset of the course, as it should be, then the implication is clear that no objective is less important to any educational level. Such as it should be in a first course in reading--first things first.

Alternatives are available to the college reading instructor to mitigate the wide range of level perception, if he would incorporate into his own operations what he teaches about individual differences. Of course, this means he would have to "practice what he preaches." It can be done (without computers, too!), but the first step to its accomplishment is the rejection of the concept of the utility of a single course prescription for each teacher of reading. Why does everyone have to take the same set of objectives (same course) in reading to become a teacher? Obviously, the alternative calls for a diagnostic approach to instruction at the college level.

Even after essential concepts have been identified and assigned a frequency rating, "a pecking order" has not necessarily been established. Since there are more competencies available to be learned than instructional

time to teach them, priorities have to be determined. By ordering the tasks, a simple model of matching available time with first order learning principles is created. Instructional time is used more efficiently, and what is taught can be taught well. The trick is not "to bite off more than we can chew."

Merely identifying, determining frequency, and assigning priorities does not turn a task or competency into an objective. It only makes it available for selection. Still each competency must be further analyzed into component concepts and sub-skills. If after distillation of the major tasks and supporting skills enough value is assigned to it, the task must be shaped into non-ambiguous language for presentation as an objective.

It is my belief the objectives should be stated in behavioral terms, i.e., stated as proposed changes in behavior and written in a form so that the results can be observed in student performance. Not only does presentation of objectives in behavioral language make them more amenable to measurement, but it permits ease in making an informed choice among the competing alternatives. As discussed earlier in this paper, objectives can become too narrow and limiting. Behavioral language facilitates this possibility, at least in our present functioning of the art. In addition, the behaviorists would lead us

to believe that there is only one type of learning--conditioning. Other types of learning do exist. Is there a "happy medium" in the use of behaviorally stated objectives? One possible option would be to use the behavioral approach and define the objectives in terms of student performance of the problems to be solved, rather than in the infinite number of discriminations to be learned. To do otherwise is to leave the prospective teacher at Erikson's fourth stage of competence and not lead him through and into the eighth and highest stage of wisdom.[2] The burden of selec-

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[2] Ibid., pp. 109-158.

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tion of behaviorally stated problem-solving objectives rests on each college reading instructor. Devising objectives which indicate a change in observable performance and reflect changes in underlying competencies will take much empirical and experimental effort by the instructor..

The question still remains: What should be included in a first course in reading? Since I do not know enough about any other instructor's course to describe it (besides, it would be quite possible to misrepresent it), the following set of objectives are used in the course I teach. They are stated as they are given to and discussed with the students on the first day of class, and given in the order of priority held for the beginning student; not in the order presented

in instructional segments during the conduct of the class.

Objectives

I. To develop a feeling of confidence toward the teaching of reading.

II. To develop a diagnostic teaching attitude toward reading instruction so as to be able to provide differentiated instruction in reading. Toward this end, the following competencies appear to be desirable and necessary. (In order of importance for the beginner.)

A. To be able to teach an effective reading lesson.

1. To recognize the teaching elements in a reading lesson and indicate the purpose the element serves.
2. To enumerate the approximate order in which a reading lesson develops.

B. To know the fundamental basis for organizing (grouping) reading instruction.

1. To be able to select the proper reading book for different readers, using an accepted criterion of difficulty.
2. To recognize different levels of reading proficiency and use this information to assign pupils to "homogeneous" reading groups.
3. To judge improvement in reading performance.

C. To know the basic speech sounds and the basic framework for phonetic and structural analysis.

1. To recognize children's phonic errors and utilize the necessary phonic rules for correction.
2. To recognize children's structural errors and to provide the general principles for correction.
3. To recognize and categorize pupils' errors on unknown words as an aid to applying instruction.

D. To describe comprehension as a set of specific sub-skills, not as a global function.

   1. To be able to frame questions which will elicit a particular type of comprehension response.
   2. To compare and recognize the relationship between questions and specific comprehension skills.

E. To be able to assess if a child is making progress commensurate with his abilities.

   1. To be able to compute a reading expectancy level by an acceptable technique.
   2. To apply acceptable margins of discrepancy between expectancy and performance.

F. To be able to assess material in terms of the behavior change it is designed to make.

   1. To recognize what skills are developed by selected exercises.
   2. To evaluate the relative difficulty of reading material for children by acceptable criteria.

A brief comment about the environment in which these objectives are used might facilitate understanding. The course carries three semester hours credit and involves thirty-four to forty actual clock hours, depending upon the semester schedule. Except for summer classes, practically all of the enrolled students are undergraduates. Even with this available time, it is difficult to transpose the objectives into outcomes. The time pressure is always there.

In addition to the six objectives stated above, I

always give some instructional time to readiness (as a multi-level process) and to looking at the reading program as a totality. The reason they are not in the list of objectives is quite obvious. I have not yet determined how to frame them into the desired language so criterion measures can be constructed which reflect the underlying behaviors.

Summary

The principal theme of this paper was that the relationship between effective outcomes in a first course in reading is directly related to the quality of the course rationale and course objectives. The rationale influences the selection of the objectives, and each objective has implications for the operations, transactions, and outcomes of the instructional scheme. A step-wise process of identification, frequency determination, priority listing, and segment analysis was suggested before framing the objectives. Behavioral terminology was advised for obtaining a degree of specificity with the focus on the problems the beginning teacher has to solve in teaching reading. An example of a rationale and a set of objectives for a first course in reading was presented. To paraphrase a familiar and distinctive expression, "as the objectives go, so goes the course."